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ABSTRACT

The Panel on the Preparation of Beginning Teachers was convened by the New Jersey Department of Education to help define two critical elements of teacher preparation: (1) What is essential for beginning teachers to know professionally? and (2) What teaching skills and abilities are most effective? This document is the report of that panel. Recommendations are presented for essential knowledge for beginning teachers in terms of: (1) the curriculum: what is taught and how it is assessed; (2) the students: their characteristics as individuals and the ways in which they learn; and (3) the setting: the classroom and the school. Recommendations are also presented for effective teaching skills, with emphasis on those skills that research suggests are most effective. Consideration is given to two additional suggestions: (1) What are the differences in essential knowledge and skills among elementary, secondary, and special education teachers? and (2) What areas of knowledge for beginning teachers are best taught in a collegiate setting? (CB)

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*Report of a*

# PANEL ON THE PREPARATION OF BEGINNING TEACHERS

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# Report of a Panel on the Preparation of Beginning Teachers

submitted to
Dr. Saul Cooperman, Commissioner
New Jersey State Department of Education
Ernest L. Boyer, Chairman
February 28, 1984

## Introduction

The Panel on the Preparation of Beginning Teachers was convened by the New Jersey Department of Education to help define two critical elements of teacher preparation: 1) what is essential for beginning teachers professionally to know?, and 2) what teaching skills and abilities are most effective?[1]

Several introductory points may help place the Panel's recommendations in perspective. First, the Panel was asked to identify knowledge and skills essential for beginning teachers to be conveyed to prospective teachers as undergraduate students or during "internships". These constraints were judged reasonable and appropriate. At the same time Panel members believe strongly that there are other areas of knowledge--such as the history and philosophy of education--that may not be essential for beginning teachers, but which are desirable nonetheless.

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[1] The Panel was asked not to comment upon the proposals for teacher certification currently being considered by the New Jersey Board of Education and, therefore, did not review or discuss these plans. A copy of the Panel's charge is attached (see Appendix "A").

Second, consistent with its charge, the Panel did not attempt to define these areas of advanced knowledge but recommends that the New Jersey Department of Education consider examining this larger question some time in the future. The Panel encouraged the recognition that teachers should feel a professional responsibility to continue to refine their skills and improve their teaching throughout their careers.

Third, Panel members are concerned that the knowledge and skills for the beginning teacher are so fundamental that they may appear almost too obvious and familiar to command the attention they deserve. Several times the point was made that those preparing beginning teachers might be tempted to view them casually or dismiss them as outcomes generally accomplished. While our recommendations do cover familiar ground, we believe that the knowledge and skills we have identified are often <u>not</u> conveyed effectively to new teachers nor applied in practice.

While we speak of "essential" knowledge, it is important to understand that such knowledge cannot and should not be imparted uniformly to all classroom students. Indeed, the ability to know when and how knowledge should be introduced is itself a basic characteristic of good teaching--one that is essential for all teachers.

Fourth, we recognize the desirability of assigning prospective teachers to various types of districts (e.g. urban, suburban,

rural) to broaden their experience. We also note, however, that there is also great diversity within a single district. Indeed, a single classroom presents a broad range of teaching challenges sufficient for the education of beginning teachers. The critical point is that preparation programs must give new teachers the opportunity--working with mentors--to apply their knowledge and skills in different ways. This goal frequently is not achieved. It is common for new teachers to use the techniques of teaching they have learned without sufficiently sensing the needs of individual students.

Finally, the Panel accepted the proposition that teaching is--or should be--a profession. This led to a discussion of the sense of powerlessness among teachers. We consider it unfortunate that classroom teachers are often at the bottom of the education ladder. The word "practitioner" is often a "low-status" term.

We also consider it unfortunate that textbook publishers and test developers often control by default what is taught in classrooms and how it is assessed. Admittedly, these specialists perform legitimate functions and, in many ways, they are better able than the isolated teacher to keep abreast of research and new developments in education. Still, all too often teachers relinquish their own professional responsibility and teaching becomes little more than "follow the manual and teach to tests."

Our recommendations are intended to encourage new teachers to be knowledgeable and thoughtful about their students, to think for themselves about what should be taught, how it should be taught, and how it is to be assessed. A basic assumption of this report is that the teacher should be a decision maker, not just a technician who links students, textbooks, and test developers. Teachers who assume roles as technicians are bound to be less inspired and less committed to their work.

In the context of these preliminary statements, then, we suggest the following areas of knowledge and skills as essential for beginning teachers.

## Essential Knowledge

What then is the basic knowledge appropriate for all beginning teachers? We conclude that all new teachers should be knowledgeable in the following three essential areas;

1. The Curriculum: What is Taught and How it is Assessed

   We begin with the conviction that what is taught is what is learned and that teachers can only convey to others the knowledge they themselves have acquired. Therefore, new teachers should first know the subject matter they must

teach--the curriculum priorities of the school--and be skilled in assessing student progress. New teachers should also learn how to organize the content and know how and when key ideas should be introduced. They should learn how to develop and use tests, with particular emphasis placed on the difference between written tests and other forms of assessment.

Beginning teachers must understand that, although paper and pencil examinations perform useful purposes, there is some learning--a trip to the museum or the reading of a literary masterpiece for example--that is valuable, even though it may be difficult to measure outcomes. Beginning teachers should have the skill to evaluate such experiences. Simply stated, the beginning teacher should know the special content to be taught--the school curriculum. They should also have the ability to determine what has been learned--the assessment.

The beginning teacher must have the skill to evaluate and choose materials to achieve both of these objectives. This means knowing how to use effectively, textbooks and teachers' guides. It also means having the confidence to select and use primary sources of information. We also conclude that beginning teachers not only need to know how to use prepackaged tests but also have the confidence and skill to construct their own evaluation instruments. In the

end assessment will reflect the experience and wisdom of the teacher and cannot or should not be replaced by externally imposed examinations.

2. The Student

The beginning teacher should also know about students, their characteristics as individuals, and the ways in which they learn. Here, matters of individual interests, student motivation and maintaining a healthy climate in the classroom are absolutely crucial. We are especially concerned that knowledge about students be down to earth, linked directly to the classroom. Abstract theories of personality or child development frequently are studied in isolation. New teachers often are bewildered when they encounter a disruptive child.

Beginning teachers should learn about procedures for preventing disruption in the classroom. One might, for example, move from real-life problems to theory, rather than the other way around. Regardless of the strategy, we conclude that the beginning teacher must not only know the curriculum and assessment; he or she must also know about the students, how they learn individually and how, in the classroom, they learn together.

We're encouraged that this is one area of education where knowledge is evolving most productively. There are, for example, exciting new discoveries about language development in young children and there are fundamental breakthroughs in brain research. We are also impressed by the potential of technology as a partner in early learning. And there is a growing recognition of diversity among students and how differences can be served. All of this suggests that new teachers must know what they teach and who they teach as well.

3. The Setting: The Classroom and the School

Teachers teach individuals, but they do so in a group setting--the classroom--and at a place we call school. Beginning teachers must know something about the classroom as a social unit and about the management of the classroom. They need to know about the school as an organization, with more or less sharply focused goals. There is growing evidence that teachers increasingly must cope with the bureaucratic social structure of public education. And it is time, perhaps, to view the teacher not only as instructor but also as executive, as one who makes decisions, allocates time, sets priorities, prepares reports and is accountable to a larger community, working within a complicated structure.

We do not applaud all aspects of the increasing complexity of the teaching task. We only note that the school is a connected institution--a community institution--and the beginning teacher must at least be somewhat familiar with the forces-- organizational, social, economic and political--that will either enhance or restrict his or her work.

Effective Teaching Skills

The Panel was charged with answering a second question, "How do effective teachers teach?" In responding, we have chosen to emphasize those special skills that research suggests are most effective. However, we wish to restate our conviction that teaching is a profession and that each successful teacher brings to the classroom more than knowledge. We must look at the person, too.

In particular, there is the elusive but critically important matter of integrity. The new teacher must be an ethical, responsible person who cares about children and is dedicated to the work of shaping lives. These personal characteristics--traits of character--cannot be taught or measured with great precision, but they can be fostered, and those who select teachers must determine if they exist. Interviewing beginning teachers and observing them--with monitors--in the classroom and school are essential. Examining the approaches which industry is using in attempting to identify integrity would be helpful.

The teaching profession would benefit perhaps from a code of ethics--similar to the oath physicians take when they enter the profession. Although such rituals may be mainly symbolic, they do represent one of the important ways a profession communicates to its new members and to the public that there are high standards of ethics and personal behavior for which they stand. If standards of integrity are crucial for those who heal, they are, we feel, even more critical for those who teach.

With respect to pedagogy itself, essential criteria for good teaching includes having clear goals, proceeding in small steps but at a appropriate pace, interspersing questions to check for understanding; giving many detailed examples and clear instructions.

Effective teachers also provide sufficient successful practice for all students; see to it that all students are involved; provide opportunity for independent work; and successfully evaluate the progress of each student.

These steps are especially important for those fields where the discipline is well ordered; where information can be introduced in sequential fashion. But they are useful, with adaptation of course, in other fields as well.

In the end, the beginning teacher must be able to stimulate creative thought, help the student evaluate what he or she has

learned, and prepare the student to use knowledge wisely. This requires skill in engaging each student in active discourse. It means a spirit of openness in the classroom--a recognition that at times the student is the teacher and that great teachers are students, too.

Finally, the point must be made that, although these skills of teaching may appear to be "common sense," unfortunately, they are not commonly practiced. We make this point, not to condemn teachers or training programs, but to underscore the importance of developing basic skills in all beginning teachers. We do, in fact, urge a high standard, recognizing that all good teachers are always in the process of becoming.

Two Additional Issues:

The Panel was asked to consider two additional subquestions: 1) What are the differences in essential knowledge and skills among elementary, secondary, and special education teachers?; and 2) What areas of knowledge for beginning teachers are best taught in a collegiate setting?

With respect to the first question, we believe the knowledge and skills identified in this report apply equally to both elementary and secondary teachers. While the general categories are the same--the content, the student and the school--it's also true that the content and context differ for each level. For example,

we recommend that all new teachers know about the students they teach. Obviously this is essential for both elementary and secondary teachers. However, elementary teachers will focus on young children while, for secondary teachers, the emphasis will be on adolescence.

We also recommend a common set of skills for both elementary and secondary teachers; however, these skills will be applied, practiced, and refined in different ways depending on the teaching level. This is especially true with language--a skill that we believe is absolutely crucial; one that must be given priority attention. And obviously, most secondary teachers are expected to present more specialized information in selected fields than are teachers in the early grades and should be prepared to present such material in appropriate ways. Overall, however, we see no need to differentiate sharply between elementary and secondary education in defining the fundamentals beginning teachers need.

Teaching the severely and profoundly handicapped is another matter. Beginning teachers who work with these students must have knowledge and skill that goes beyond those discussed in this report. This exception extends to those who teach even moderately handicapped students who are appropriately classified as such. The usual classification of children with Down's syndrome, for example, places them in the moderately handicapped classification (we recognize that there is disagreement among

special educators about the appropriate classification). We are not certain that the regular system is either prepared or able to teach these children.

We are disturbed, however, that local school districts, particularly those in urban areas, are classifying an excessive number of students as "special". This trend can be attributed in part to the increased federal funding the schools receive when students are so classified. The role of child study teams can become one of "searching for pathology" in order to justify the classification of those students. There is also a growing tendency to refer to special education <u>any</u> student who is difficult to teach, whether or not that student exhibits any particularly identifiable handicap. Clearly, such a practice sacrifices students to the system. We also should note that regular education teachers often refer so many children to special education because they feel they have no time to give equal help.

Far fewer children should be referred to special education. At the same time the school system has a corresponding obligation to offer these children additional support within the regular education system. And regular teachers will need to know more about the teaching of such children.

With respect to the issue of <u>where</u> professional knowledge can best be presented, there is no single answer, no one arrangement

that is always best. The college setting offers obvious advantages. Here there are research and library resources. On the campus, prospective teachers can meet with colleagues, and have time for reflective thinking. It's also true, of course, that there are collegiate settings where these goals are not achieved, but the potential cannot be ignored.

At the same time, there are non-collegiate "laboratory" situations that also may be appropriate for conveying knowledge and skills to prospective teachers. Here students actually meet with students, they encounter what we like to call "real-life" situations. Perhaps the best approach is to join the learning places, to build partnerships or coalitions among the separate institutions interested in teacher preparation with new organizational arrangements to help educators carry on their work. Teacher associations and organizations should feel a special responsibility to support high levels of professionalism among their membership and actively promote programs to enhance the skills of candidates and older students.

At the same time, we are concerned that partnerships, when they do exist, frequently are dominated by higher education. The ideas of the teachers are trapped within traditional collegiate structures of semesters, credit-hours and the like. Therefore, if coalitions are established around laboratory training programs, we recommend that new structures be flexible and provide active participation of all parties.

Indeed, it is the conviction of the panel that teaching will become a profession in this nation only as there is a closer and continuing link between theory and practice, between the colleges and the schools.

## Appendix A

### Charge to the Certification Panel

In order to provide a sound basis for all New Jersey's teacher education and certification initiatives, it is essential that the Panel provide us with its best judgment regarding two major questions:

1. WHAT IS ESSENTIAL FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS TO KNOW ABOUT THE PROFESSION? and

2. HOW DO EFFECTIVE TEACHERS TEACH?

For purposes of selecting new teachers, it is important that we focus not on the universe of knowledge which might be useful and acquired during the course of a career. Rather, we must attempt an identification of that professional knowledge which is essential for the beginning teacher so as to achieve a degree of significance in what is required while avoiding the perpetuation of artificial hurdles. In addition, it is critical that we synthesize the research on effective teaching as a means of improving the preparation process and the criteria for determining who is effective.

Although the task is complex and cannot be completed with 100 percent assurity, it is nonetheless necessary that the Panel assist us in establishing a tentative position. The professional

justment and consensus of experts will provide us with an excellent starting point from which our system can evolve and progress.

Finally, as a corollary to the basic charge the Panel should also advise us as to which, if any, areas of knowledge and skills are best acquired in college.

The Panel is not to evaluate the overall system proposed. The State Board of Education in its deliberations has established an elaborate process for making its decisions to adopt, modify, or reject the basic plan in concert with the many segments of the state community interested in quality education. There are many substantive and political issues to be considered in this process and the Panel, to achieve its goals, must remain aloof from those who support or oppose one or another approach.